

READ ME FIRST

We appreciate your interest in the Federal Supply Schedule (FSS) Program. Under the FSS Program, the General Services Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs (GSA/VA) establish long-term Governmentwide contracts with commercial firms to provide ordering activities with access to a wide variety of commercial supplies and/or services. This letter provides pertinent background information on the FSS Program. You should consider this information prior to deciding whether to submit an offer for an FSS contract. Please read this letter in its entirety to learn about the benefits and responsibilities associated with being an FSS contractor. You will then be better informed to determine if obtaining an FSS contract is the right business decision for your firm.

To help with the educational process on Multiple Award Schedules (MAS) GSA has designed a “Vendor Toolbox” in the Vendor Support Center which will walk a supplier through researching, analyzing, and deciding whether it is the best business decision to pursue an MAS contract. If the supplier decides to become an offeror, it provides an understanding of the steps that need to be taken to be successful in the Federal marketplace <https://vsc.gsa.gov>. Once on the VSC website, select the “Toolbox” tab which will take you to the “Vendor Toolbox.” The FSS Program is designed to enable ordering activities to purchase commercial supplies and/or services quickly, efficiently, at fair and reasonable prices and still meet all the requirements of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). The commercial supplies and/or services awarded under FSS contracts are divided into approximately 32 distinct schedules. In total, there are approximately 19,000 FSS contracts in place with more added daily, covering over 11 million supplies and/or services.

AbilityOne Program

The AbilityOne Program is a federal procurement program that generates jobs for individuals who are blind or have another significant disability through the manufacturing of products or the provision of services required by federal personnel. Products and services on the AbilityOne Procurement List are mandatory for use by federal customers. The mandatory source requirement of the AbilityOne Program as outlined by the Javits-Wagner-O’Day (JWOD) Act (41 U.S.C. 46 – 48c) must be adhered by all schedule holders. Certain commercial products are considered “essentially the same” (ETS) as AbilityOne products. Because the AbilityOne products are mandatory purchases for federal customers, contractors are required to remove the commercial ETS items from its offer. If you offer products that are ETS as AbilityOne products, you are encouraged to become an authorized distributor of AbilityOne products. For more information on the AbilityOne Program and how to become an authorized distributor, please visit www.abilityone.gov. Point of contact at the AbilityOne Program is Mr. Eric Beale at ebeale@abilityone.gov or (703) 603-2119.

Becoming a successful FSS contractor requires that your company take a few key steps. The first step to success under the FSS Program is to perform due diligence and understand your commitments and obligations as an FSS contractor. Companies that have prepared well, understand their commitments and obligations, and have plans to meet those commitments and obligations have thrived under the FSS Program.

The next step is to select the schedule that best aligns to the commercial supplies and/or services your company wants to offer. This action can be accomplished by accessing GSA eLibrary at www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov. Under the "Schedules Contracts" box on the right, select "View Schedules Contracts" to view the complete list of schedules. By clicking on any schedule number, you can then view the generic categories of supplies and/or services under a particular schedule. For more information about GSA eLibrary, go to www.gsa.gov/elibrary. Detailed information on selecting the schedule(s) that best aligns to your offering can be found in the "Vendor Toolbox" located at <https://vsc.gsa.gov> under the "Toolbox" tab.

Once you have determined the proper schedule under which to submit your offer, the next step is to download, read, and understand the solicitation. You may access this solicitation by clicking on "Vendors: Click here to view the current solicitation on FedBizOpps," which is located on each individual schedule's page. It is essential to read the entire schedule solicitation.

Understanding the terms and conditions of an FSS contract and your contractual obligations is critical to your success as an FSS contract holder.

You can also download the solicitation directly from FedBizOpps by accessing www.fedbizopps.gov. From the FedBizOpps website, you may search by GSA Office, VA National Acquisition Center, Solicitation Number, or Keyword. We encourage you to visit both GSA eLibrary and FedBizOpps, since each site provides important news and information.

Please note that the award of an FSS contract does NOT guarantee future sales and it is up to you to market your company. Although the FSS Program provides significant benefits to ordering activities, they are not required to use the FSS Program to fulfill their requirements. With thousands of contracts already in place, competition for orders under the FSS Program is fierce.

HOW TO DECIDE IF A FSS CONTRACT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

First, take the mandatory "Pathway to Success" free education seminar and test. "Pathway to Success" is designed to assist prospective FSS contractors in making informed business decisions as to whether obtaining an FSS contract is in their best interest. The presentation also provides background information on the FSS Program. You may attend either a live presentation or complete the web based presentation. To complete the seminar online, go to the [Vendor Support Center \(VSC\)](https://vsc.gsa.gov) at <https://vsc.gsa.gov>. Once on the VSC website, select "Pathway to Success" under the "Training" or the "Toolbox" tab. Email pathwaytosuccess@gsa.gov to gain more information on how to attend a live presentation. The seminar includes topics such as expectations of vendors, how to compete and succeed as a schedule contractor, how to develop a schedule-specific business plan, and how to submit a quality offer.

Next, take the mandatory "Readiness Assessment" free self evaluation. The "Readiness Assessment" is designed to assist prospective offerors in researching, analyzing, and deciding whether they are able to compete as an FSS contractor. The mandatory "Readiness Assessment" is a downloadable form that is in the VSC at <https://vsc.gsa.gov> and resides in the "Vendor Toolbox." Once on the VSC website, select the "Toolbox" tab located between "Home" and "Getting on Advantage." This tool will help your firm understand the amount of time and money that is needed to be a successful FSS contractor. It is required that this assessment be signed by an officer of your firm who is authorized to commit and is mandatory before submitting an offer. It is important that your firm understand the solicitation clauses and

requirements such as past performance, and certifications, etc. Therefore it is suggested that an officer carefully read and review the solicitation to which your firm will be responding PRIOR to completing this assessment. The assessment contains a combination of “Yes/No” and short answer questions. Each question will reference a step in the vendor toolbox that will assist your firm in researching, analyzing, and deciding if you are ready to become an MAS contractor.

Next, locate the "New Contactor Orientation" webcast under the "Vendor Training" tab on the [Vendor Support Center \(VSC\)](#) website. The webcast was developed to define key contract requirements with which a vendor must comply and outlines how GSA/VA evaluates FSS contract performance. While visiting the VSC, also review *The Steps to Success: Make the Most of your GSA Contract* under the "Publications" tab. This document provides an overview of FSS contract requirements, including key reporting documents. Both learning tools are highly recommended reading, as they provide information for you to confidently comply with contractual obligations and ensure that you are ready to be an excellent FSS contractor. For more information about the VSC, visit <https://vsc.gsa.gov>.

Also, you can identify and assess your competition. This important task can be accomplished by visiting GSA eLibrary at <http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov/ElibMain/home.do> and [GSA Advantage!®](#) at https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/advantage/main/start_page.do. In addition to providing access to schedule solicitations, GSA eLibrary is our online source for FSS contract award information; GSA Advantage!® is our online shopping and ordering system. Both websites contain information regarding the supplies and/or services that current FSS contractors offer. The information collected from these websites should assist you in identifying potential competitors under the FSS Program. The knowledge gained from this effort will help you assess your firm's ability to compete, if awarded an FSS contract. Your review of the competition should include: competitors' pricing, delivery times, warranty terms, services, and any other elements that make their offerings distinctive. For more information about GSA Advantage!®, visit https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/advantage/main/start_page.do.

Another online tool for assessing your FSS Program competition is [Schedule Sales Query \(SSQ\)](#) at <http://ssq.gsa.gov>. SSQ provides detailed sales information on current FSS contractors. On this site, you can search to see if your competitors have successfully sold similar supplies and/or services under the FSS Program. For more information on SSQ, visit www.gsa.gov/schedulesalesquery.

Your review and analysis of the preceding websites should allow you to assess the competitive environment for the supplies and/or services you want to provide. Once you understand the requirements which you will have to follow and the market in which you will have to operate, you can then decide whether a FSS contract is the right business investment for your firm.

We recommend that you become familiar with the Federal procurement proposal evaluation factors. At a minimum, Government buyers will evaluate price and past performance, and possibly your firm's expertise in providing the supplies and/or services you are seeking to offer. Purchasers under the FSS Program make a selection of an FSS contractor based upon "best value." FAR 2.101 defines "best value" as the expected outcome of an acquisition that, in the Government's estimation, provides the greatest overall benefit in response to the requirement.

An important criteria to consider is whether the items you propose are compliant with the [Trade Agreements Act](#), which can be found at http://acquisition.gov/far/current/html/Subpart%2025_4.html#wp1086589. The Trade Agreements Act (19 U.S.C. 2501, et seq.) is the enabling statute that implements numerous multilateral and bilateral international trade agreements and other trade initiatives. Since the estimated dollar value of each schedule exceeds the established Trade Agreements Act (TAA) threshold, the TAA is applicable to all schedules. In accordance with the TAA, only U.S.-made or [designated country](#) end products shall be offered and sold under schedule contracts. For the definition of "designated country," go to http://acquisition.gov/far/current/html/Subpart%2025_1.html#wp1118780.

GSA offers ordering activity buyers training and provides them with informational material about the benefits of the FSS Program. Such benefits include the following:

- Acquisition lead time is reduced.
- Wide selection of state-of-the-art commercial supplies and/or services.
- Schedule orders are not required to be synopsized.
- GSA has already determined schedule prices to be fair and reasonable

Although GSA/VA provide informational material on the benefits of the FSS Program, GSA/VA do not market or promote specific contracts, distribute products of individual firms, or steer business to any individual contractor. If awarded a FSS contract, you will be required to market your supplies and/or services to ordering activities. You will be required to upload an approved schedule price list on GSA Advantage!®. Since purchasing authority is spread out across all ordering activities, marketing your supplies and/or services may not be an easy task. You are strongly encouraged to target markets and build relationships in much the same way you market to commercial customers. Finally, how well you perform under your FSS contract is up to you.

If you decide to submit an offer and are awarded an FSS contract, be advised that GSA will require your sales to exceed \$25,000 within the first 24 months after your contract is awarded. Your company will then be expected to exceed \$25,000 in sales each succeeding 12 month period in order to retain your FSS contract. If your company is newly established or has had low sales in the supplies and/or services you want to offer under the FSS Program, you should consider the difficulty you may have in meeting this performance requirement. If you ultimately decide to submit an offer under the FSS Program, having a business plan to meet this performance requirement will be critical to ensuring your success as an FSS contractor.

YES, I WANT TO SUBMIT AN OFFER

Excellent! GSA/VA are always looking for highly qualified firms to increase competition and serve the needs of the ordering activities. While not all firms are awarded FSS contracts, the FSS Program, in accordance with statutory authority, is open to all responsible offerors. To be considered for award of an FSS contract, you must demonstrate that your firm meets all FSS Program requirements, including a reasonable and competitive price. To understand the term responsible, please refer to [FAR 9.104-1](#), which identifies the standards a prospective contractor must possess to be determined responsible. To read FAR 9.104-1, go to http://acquisition.gov/far/current/html/Subpart%209_1.html#wp1084076.

Currently, the time required to evaluate and award an FSS contract can range from three to six months. Well prepared and documented offers with competitive pricing are easier to evaluate and may expedite the award process.

GSA has developed [eOffer](#), a web based application that allows an offeror to prepare and submit an FSS offer electronically. eOffer is designed to create an interactive, secure environment that simplifies the contracting process, from submission of offer to contract award. eOffer uses the latest digital authentication technology to ensure the integrity of data and to electronically sign the offer. Digital certificates are required in order to use eOffer. The eOffer website at <http://eoffer.gsa.gov> contains a variety of information regarding the eOffer application, including available training, and information regarding digital certificates. It is required that eOffer be used to submit an offer. For more information on eOffer, visit www.gsa.gov/eoffer.

Once you submit an offer, GSA will look for a number of items. We will verify that you have submitted all the required information necessary to evaluate your offer. The following are key elements of your offer that will be reviewed:

- Pricing
- Past performance
- Scope -- the supplies/services are within the scope of the Schedule solicitation
- Financial capability
- Technical
- Subcontracting Plan (if you are not a small business concern)
- Other regulatory compliance

Good Luck. We want you to be successful, and look forward to the start of a long and successful partnership.

NO, I DO NOT WANT TO SUBMIT AN OFFER RIGHT NOW. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS DO I HAVE FOR FEDERAL BUSINESS?

If you decide an FSS contract is not a good fit for your firm at this time, you can still participate in other Federal Government acquisitions. In some cases, pursuing other avenues may be even more advantageous.

Other Government contracting opportunities are posted on [FedBizOpps](#) at www.fedbizopps.gov. Commercial vendors seeking Federal markets can search, monitor, and retrieve solicitations for supplies and services issued by all Federal agencies. The FAR addresses the circumstances under which an acquisition of supplies and/or services with an estimated dollar value exceeding \$3,000 but not over the simplified acquisition threshold gives preference to small business concerns.

Business concerns may also participate in subcontracting opportunities with companies already under contract to the Federal Government. The [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) (www.sba.gov) provides information on subcontracting, as well as other topics of interest to firms seeking business opportunities. Existing schedule contractors are always looking for opportunities to subcontract to small business, small disadvantaged business, women-owned small business, HUBZone small business, veteran-owned small business, and service-disabled veteran-owned small business concerns.

Remember, the FSS Program is continually open. If you have determined the FSS Program is not the correct contracting vehicle for your firm at this time, we encourage you to periodically revisit your business plan and the opportunity to market your supplies and/or services under the FSS Program at a later date.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the FSS Program. We wish you great success in whatever method you chose to market to Government agencies.